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# ILLINOIS TRAILERING

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## REGISTRATION & SAFETY DIGEST

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## TRAILER SELECTION

A boat trailer serves two primary functions. First, it transports the boat to and from the launch site; and second, it provides a storage cradle for the boat when it is not in use. For safety on the highway and prevention of damage to the hull, proper trailer selection is extremely important.

**Weight Capacity.** The boat trailer should have an adequate weight carrying capacity to handle boat, motor, and *all the extra gear that will be carried in it*. A trailer's weight carrying capacity is stamped on a metal plate, usually located on the tongue.

**Length, supports.** The trailer must be long enough so that the hull will rest securely on the aftermost supports. Any overhang in the transom area can cause damage to the hull. A good trailer duplicates as much as possible the support given to the boat in the water. Pads or rollers should be of sufficient number and *properly adjusted* so as to provide maximum support. Not enough support may cause the keel to break or the hull to "hook" or warp.

## EQUIPMENT

For safety, both to protect a valuable investment and to insure a safe trip on the highways, proper equipment is as important as the initial selection of the trailer.

**Hitches.** The drawbar for a trailer hitch should be mounted to the frame of the towing vehicle. Bumper hitches should not be used. For heavier loads, a draw bar of the weight distributing or "equalizer" type should be used to distribute the weight and pulling power throughout the frame of the towing vehicle.

**Ball Coupler.** Make sure that the ball coupler is of the proper size to match the coupler on the trailer tongue. A ball too small for the coupler could cause the trailer to break loose from the towing vehicle resulting in a serious accident. The ball stem should be fit tightly in the hole on the drawbar and be secured with lock washers.

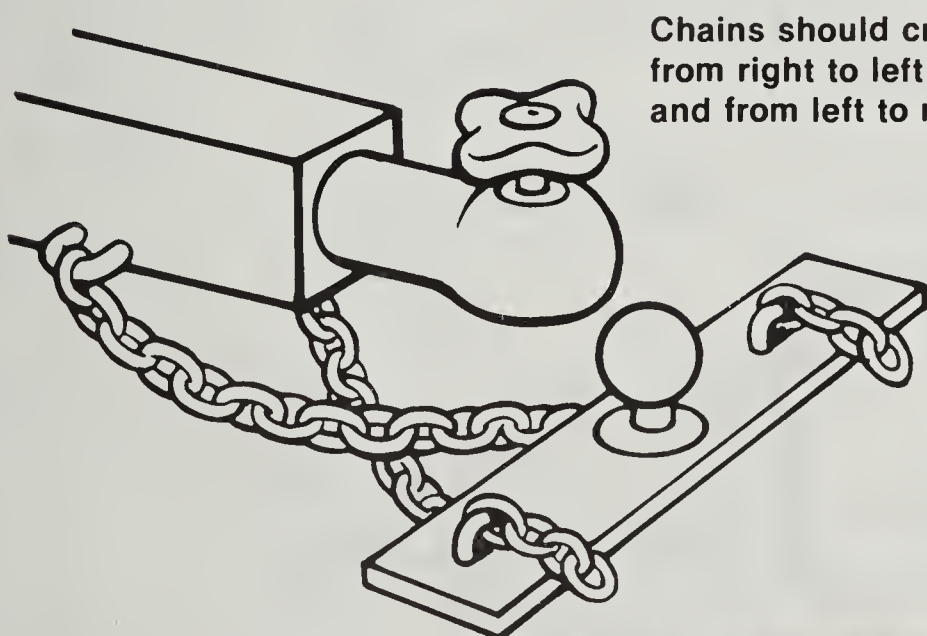
**Tires.** Tires should be of sufficient size and load bearing capacity to handle the anticipated weight. Generally, the larger the size, the better the towing characteristics. Small tires turn faster, resulting in excess wear and more stress on wheel bearings. A larger tire provides a better ride on uneven roads.

**Safety Chains.** Illinois Law requires that a trailer be equipped with two safety chains, attached to the towing vehicle. It is suggested they be attached in a criss-cross or "X" pattern. Safety chains should be adjusted so that they do not drag on the ground, but with enough slack so that the trailer may be turned.

**Lights.** The law requires that all trailers be equipped with the same lighting system required on the rear of the towing vehicle and that all lights operate in conjunction with the lights on the vehicle (tail lights, stop lights, and brake lights). Two red reflectors are required on the rear of the trailer, in addition to a white license plate lamp. Combination lights may be used.

**Brakes.** The law requires an independent trailer braking system when the trailer exceeds 3,000 pounds or 40% of the weight of the towing vehicle. There are three types of trailer braking systems currently in use: hydraulic, electric, and surge. Surge brakes are the most common found on trailers of medium capacity and operate automatically as the vehicle slows.

**Tie-downs.** When trailering, the boat should have a sufficient number of tie-downs to securely hold the boat from bouncing on the rollers or pads. A tie-down line or the winch cable should be secured thru the bow eye, with two tie-downs securing the transom. Depending on the size of the craft, additional straps may be required across the beam of the boat and secured to the frame.



Chains should cross  
from right to left  
and from left to right

Recommended method for  
attaching safety chains





## TITLING & LICENSING

1. All recreational vehicles in Illinois are subject to Illinois Registration.
2. Registration assistance and applications are available from:
  - Secretary of State's Office
  - Licensed Illinois Vehicle Dealers
  - Licensed Remittance Agents
  - Currency Exchanges
3. For information contact:  
Secretary of State Office  
General Public Inquiry  
Centennial Building  
Springfield, IL. 62756  
(217) 782-1059  
Toll Free 800-252-8980



**Remove wheels and repack bearings at least twice a year.**  
(More frequent if submerged in water.)

## MAINTENANCE

Proper maintenance of the boat trailer is essential to highway safety, not to mention the inconvenience of breaking down along the road.

**Tire and wheel bearings.** Tires should be checked regularly for proper inflation, wear, and the casings inspected for cuts or imbedded objects caught in the treads. Wheel bearings should be greased at least once a year, more often if they are submerged when launching. As a security measure, tow the trailer for about a mile, then stop and feel the hub for excess heat. If the hub feels hot, bearings should be greased immediately.

**Lights.** Lights should be checked at the start of every trip to make sure they are operating correctly. Waterproof lamp housing should be used if the lights are submerged when launching.

**Carry spare parts.** Always carry properly inflated spare tire. Make sure you have the proper jack and lug wrench — many times standard automotive equipment will not accommodate your boat trailer. *Carry an extra wheel bearing set and a container of grease.* Most service stations do not carry these parts and a breakdown can spoil an entire outing. Extra bulbs are a good idea, along with spare fuses for the towing vehicle. Don't forget a well equipped tool kit.

**Mirrors.** Extra wide mirrors may be required if the boat being towed is high or wide. A right-side external mirror is required by law if normal vision from the rear-view mirror is obscured by the rig under tow.



A well-balanced trailer will not cause the rear end of the towing vehicle to sag. (Coupler weight should be kept between 40 and 50 lbs.)

## LAUNCHING AND RETRIEVING

Boat launching is a two man operation, requiring one person to guide the driver and handle the boat on the ramp. *A launching ramp is no place to learn how to back a trailer.* If you're new to trailerboating, practice backing your rig in your driveway, on a quiet street, or in an empty parking lot.

At the launch site, be as courteous and efficient as possible so as not to delay others. Have all gear stowed on board the boat before approaching the ramp. Remove cover, secure your lines, have fenders in place if necessary, and remove all tie-downs except for the bow winch. *Don't forget the drain plug. Don't forget to unhook your lights.*

Pre-check the launch site before backing down. Check the degree of slope, water depth, and the surface of the ramp to be sure you will have sufficient traction. If others are ahead of you at the ramp, observe several launchings to better judge how your rig will handle.

Don't back down any farther than necessary to launch your boat, set the handbrake and block the wheel of the vehicle. Have your guide hold onto the lead line from the bow when sliding the boat into the water.

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## SAILBOATS NOTE

Watch for overhead powerlines in the vicinity of launch ramps. Every year several people are electrocuted when a mast comes in contact with high tension lines. *When in doubt of clearance, lower your mast.*

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## SAFETY CHECK LIST

- ☐ Is your trailer hitch tightened securely? It is very important to double check the tightness after you drive the first 100 yards.
- ☐ Is your safety chain secured properly? If too long, it will drag and if too short, it will hamper making sharp turns.
- ☐ Is your boat on your trailer correctly? Bow in place? Center of boat on center of trailers? All rollers against bottom of boat? All tie-downs tight and secure?
- ☐ Are all of your trailer lights working properly? Right turn? Left turn? Stop lights? Parking lights? License light? Hazard warning signals?
- ☐ Are your trailer tires properly inflated and in good condition? Carry a spare if possible.
- ☐ Have your trailer wheel bearings been greased recently? Submerging in water when loading and unloading washes grease out very rapidly and will cause bearings to burn out unless repacked.

Remember when towing a trailer it will take you longer to stop. (Keep Your Distance.)



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